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Stated Fasts.

BY
A SELF-TAUGHT LAYMAN.

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STATED FASTS.

IN the P.B. there are ninety days for which there are Epistles, all of which, with seven exceptions only, are from the N.T. Of these seven exceptions three are for Lent, and for the first day of Lent, that most important of the "Church" fasts (*not* Christian, for Christ never inculcated fasting, as Churchmen understand it), the compilers of the P.B. could not find a single Epistle for fasting in the N.T.!!! Neither Paul nor Peter, James, John nor Jude could help them, and they had to turn to one of the Lesser Prophets of the O.T., Joel, who wrote only three chapters, six or seven hundred years before the New Dispensation, and but lately a clergyman, in answer to an article of mine, said "God's word is 'Sanctify a fast,'" to which my reply was, "God's word *was* 'Sanctify a fast,'" not *is*. For Joel foresaw an impending calamity of a water famine and plague of locusts, and exhorted the Jews to turn to God, and this exhortation, *for this particular fast only*, the P.B. takes as an authority for a Stated Fast of *forty days in every year*, even should Lent occur at a most pros-

perous season, and a time therefore especially adapted not for fasting, *but thanksgiving*. For St. Paul who lived more than thirty years after our Lord's death, and wrote fourteen Epistles, never recommended us to fast, but on the contrary, told us to REJOICE in the Lord alway, and in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, to let our requests be made known unto God ; and moreover, classed the commanding to *abstain from meats*, among the *doctrines of devils*, and said also that bodily exercise profiteth little.

It is true our Lord fasted forty days but it was after He was delivered over unto Satan, and may it not therefore have been part of His temptation, for it was only after He was reduced by hunger that Satan made proposals to Him ?

No stress whatever is laid upon His fasting in the N. T. In fact Mark does not even mention it ! Had it been intended as an example for us would it have been treated so lightly in the Gospels, and *entirely ignored in the Epistles* ? It is too often called a miraculous fast, but where was the miracle ? We are not told that our most blessed Lord did neither eat nor drink, as in Esther's case, but only that He fasted or restricted Himself to a very plain diet, perhaps bread and water only, and naturally after forty days of the same diet, he hungered terribly.

In one case A.D. 17, our Lord spoke to the Jews about observing their fasts, but He did not tell us to follow their example, yet still this address to them is given to us as the Gospel for the first day of Lent, as if our Lord intended to advise us to fast. And here it is worthy of note, that the Jews had *only one* divinely appointed Stated Fast. This was the great day of the Expiation, appointed by the Law of Moses, and it was a fast of *one day only*. All their other fasts were

National ones appointed at succeeding times by the authority of the State.

Our Lord acknowledged that His own disciples did not fast, adding that the days would come when they would do so, as if like David their hearts would be smitten so that they would forget to eat their bread. About the year 28, He said that if His mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes—that is to say, according to the Jewish custom of the Old Dispensation, but two-score years later, A.D. 63, Paul tells us that under the New Dispensation the rites of the law had passed away, and it is no longer the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, but the blood of Christ alone that will purge a conscience from dead works.

In four places in the N.T. the word “fasting” is an interpolation, as is proved by the Revised Version, and it was the cunning work of the PRIESTHOOD in order to have Biblical authority for fasting, against marrying in Lent, &c.,* and thereby enabling them to levy toll upon the ignorant or superstitious laity, for indulgences or dispensations in advance, or absolutions afterwards.

The most ancient MSS. are the Vatican, Sinaitic and Alexandrian, the last of which dates from about A.D. 450, and the falsifications probably took place about that date. Mosheim (who died in 1755, and who was not therefore aware of these interpolations) shows the doctrine then taught. He says that in the third century fasting “began to be held in more esteem than it had formerly been : a high degree of sanctity was attributed

* *Vide* Prof. Morley's *Russian Life*, London, 1866, page 272.

to this practice, and it was even looked upon as of indispensable necessity, from a notion that the demons directed their stratagems principally against those who pampered themselves with delicious fare; and were less troublesome to the lean and hungry who lived under the severities of a rigorous abstinence;" and in the following century he adds, it was considered as "the most effectual and powerful means of repelling the force and disconcerting the stratagems of evil spirits, and of appeasing the anger of an offended Deity."

One of the early Reformers, Cassian, a disciple of Chrysostom, and who was, according to Canon Robertson, a person of considerable note and influence, writing in the fifth century and contrasting the primitive church with the church of his day, said, "It ought to be known that the observance of the forty days has no existence, so long as the perfection of that primitive church lasted," and this was perfectly true, for our Lenten fast, which did not originally refer to the forty days in the desert, as it was primarily *a tithe of the year only*, was first established at thirty-six days about A.D. 130, long after the death of the Apostles. Four days more were afterwards added, and in 487, a Pope endeavoured to settle it at the forty days. He was not infallible however, for the four additional days were not recognized in Scotland until as late as the eleventh century, and five centuries after the Presbyterians abolished Lent entirely, while our semi-Protestant (!) Church of England retained the Lenten fast in company not only with the Roman, but also with the Greek, the Armenian, the Maronite, the Jacobite, the Nestorian, and the Coptic and Abyssinian Churches, whose half-civilised priests are the equals of our so-called priests, for they all have Episcopal ordination, and

also as true Apostolical succession as that claimed for the English Church, although Archbishop Whately and many others have shown the absurdity of that pretended claim. The members of these churches are all undoubted Churchmen—but *certainly not Low Churchmen!*

A late writer says of the Abyssinian Church, that “ Their religion is mostly a formality ; their priests are ignorant . . . their chief service consisting of the repetition of an extensive liturgy, and Christianity (*he should have said Churchianity*) is an observance of rites, ceremonies and good deeds. The Abyssinians celebrate about two hundred fast days, and whoever is not able to fast so long and often informs the priest who for a pecuniary consideration undertakes the task for him.”

The Armenians are also good High Churchmen, for they believe in the Real Presence,* and Dean Hook says “ they scrupulously observe fasting ; and fasts so frequently occur that their whole religion seems to consist in fasting,” and but lately the *Temoïn de la Verité* stated that in Equador, where there is a Romanist Church for every 150 inhabitants, and one-tenth of the population consists of priests, monks and nuns, 270 days in the year are either fast or fête days. Three quarters of this holy (!) South American State can neither read nor write.

Although the Bible only commands us to observe one day in seven as holy, the P.B. contains about 200 ceremonial days

* The Armenians do not, I presume, have family portraits, but if one of us were to point to the wall and say “ That is my father,” would he mean to imply that it was his father’s living self, his real presence, or that it represented his father?

of feasting and fasting, and while we all of us call our Sundays feast days, some of us absolutely blame the Romanists for making them (after mass) *really* what *we ourselves call them*, namely, days of festivity !

Friday is one of our Church fast days, and in the American Church almanac every Friday is marked in heavy black type "fast." Are our American brethren of the laity aware that this "fast" so strongly inculcated is only an *English political one* ? There is no other authority for it in [the Protestant Episcopal Church.

After the blessed Reformation, when the people were no longer obliged to eat fish, the Government feared the demand would decrease, and the fisheries, that nursery for seamen, would decline, and this law was passed for their benefit and (A.D. 1579) "to reduce the high price of meat." The Order in Council to Archbishop Grindall, in 1576, requests him, as "Her Majesty's good meaning may either be misconstrued by some, and depraved by others, as though any superstition were thereby intended to give order that the ministers and preachers be commanded to declare unto the people that the same is not required for any *liking of Popish ceremonies heretofore urged* (which *utterly are detested*), but only to *maintain the mariners and navy in this land by setting men a-fishing.*"

In the Roman and Greek Churches, fasting cannot now be done by deputy, but dispensations to eat flesh on fasting days, can be obtained by the rich, while the Church gains credit for its liberality by sometimes granting dispensations gratis to the poor who cannot pay, to eat dripping or the like on fasting days.

Do any of my readers remember how Edmond About's Greek friends longed for Easter? If fasting is any proof, the Greeks are better Catholics than the Romans for they have both more and stricter fasts. About says "I know of nothing more fit for irritating the disposition than the Greek Lent. They not only deprive themselves of meat, but they interdict themselves the use of butter, eggs, sugar, and often of fish. They only eat bread, caviar, and herbs seasoned with oil. Indeed, Lent sets the minds of all on fire, and makes all the political and religious passions to effervesce."

"It will be believed that, if the Greeks restrict themselves to such a severe diet, it is not for the pleasure only of eating mouldy olives; it is especially to gain heaven. But the odds are, that Lent sends more people down below than to heaven; so much does it make them commit sins of envy. I have never seen a Greek eating olives without hearing him say, 'Won't I just eat meat on Easter-day!'"

"During the holy week . . . Our host, the *anagnostis* (reader) in the island of Ægina, used to repeat to me every day, at his meals, 'You shall see how I will drink wine on the day of *the brilliant!* how I will dance! how I will get drunk! how I will fall flat as a pig, with my face on the ground!' This man was naturally sober, and without the fast he perhaps would never have got drunk at all."

"It is with these pious thoughts that the people and the clergy abridge the length of the fast. They think they do enough for their salvation in interdicting themselves forbidden meats; and they imagine that the *submission of the stomach* dispenses them from that of the heart."

About passed two Lents in Greece, one in the city and one

in the country. I myself read his work *in Greece*, on my second visit to that country, just after it was published, and believe it to be a faithful picture.

The Russians have a proverb "Heaven can only be reduced by famine," and they have accordingly four stated Fasts, viz. : the Great Lent (of Easter) of seven weeks (forty-nine days) ; St. Peter's fast from Trinity Monday to June 29th, and lasting therefore from about a week to a month, according to the time when Easter falls ; the Assumption, from the 1st of August to the 15th, fourteen days, and the Christmas fast from the 15th of November, forty days, besides which there are six great days of prayer and repentance, and thirty-one Wednesdays and as many Fridays, not included in the above. Total 177 to 200 days. During all this time marriages are prohibited and the married must live as if they were single. But confession follows, and then the remedy, offered to the blind by the leaders of the blind. The power of the purse, and the gold of the rich and the silver of the middle classes is quickly transferred to the Church, *i.e.*, into the pockets of the priests, and what a charmingly aristocratic heaven those laymen must look forward to where only the well-to-do will be admitted. But how does this agree with the words of the Prophet "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, *and he that hath no money* ; come ye, buy, and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk WITHOUT MONEY AND WITHOUT PRICE," and mark well, this was said at a time not very dissimilar to our own, when God's chosen people knew that the servants of Baal practised both fasting and auricular confession, and by consequence, for priestcraft (churchcraft) is the same always, absolution could be procured for CASH.

There are some, of course, who keep the fasts strictly, but another French author, Lacroix, says, "As to the rich, *they buy the right* of living during the fast the same as they do the rest of the year. When they are obliged to conform to the rules of the Church, they fast by eating the most delicate fish, vegetables raised in hot houses, and nourishing fruits ripened by the heat of stoves."

Before Easter every one must confess and receive absolution, and the following is one way that it is done. Prof. Morley, in his *Sketches of Russian Life*, says, of a servant who asked leave to go to Church, and was told that he could not be spared. "But I must go; this is the last day of confessing. I will be back in a few minutes." "How can you manage to confess all your year's sins in a few minutes?" "Your honour, if I only had five kopecks the priest would keep me a long time; but I have a rouble, and that will get me through in five minutes; I know how to do." "Off the fellow went and returned in less than half an hour with all his spiritual accounts squared."

The three Rogation Days were instituted by a French bishop, in 460, and the twelve Ember Days were made as a local Roman custom about A.D. 440, and only became general for the whole Roman Church, about 813. These latter are peculiar to the Roman and English Churches (*par nobile fratrum*), the Eastern Churches never having adopted them, but why should a church of the Reformation still fast on the days appointed by Bishop Mamercus and Pope Leo, as our calendar directs us to do!

Pope Gregory the Great (590—604), introduced the sprinkling of ashes on the first day of Lent, and hence the name

Ash Wednesday, and even to the present time in the Roman Catholic Church, people are touched on the forehead with ashes. Protestants have given up the ceremony, but why do they still retain Pope Gregory's name?

There are many who condemn marrying in Lent, but have they any other authority than the Church of Rome? None whatever, and the Roman Church rest only on a Canon or By-Law of the Council of Laodicea, a synod of thirty-two bishops only, so obscure that it is uncertain whether it was held as early as A.D. 314, or as late as A.D. 399. Moreover, it was not even a General Council, but on the contrary an irregular one, either provincial or diocesan. It was besides a semi-Arian Council, nor have the original canons been preserved, for all that we have is an abstract or summary come down to us through a collector, and not in the shape in which they were passed! The copy of a copy, and what would such evidence be worth in a court of law? The Council of Lerida in 546, was formerly added to confirm this decision against marrying at certain seasons, but it is now allowed that the supposed Canon is spurious, but even were it not so what right had this little Spanish Council of nine members only, to dictate to the whole Christian world? As much only, and no more than a synod of one of the Australian dioceses would have to lay down laws for the Church in England.

Let a man lead a careless, worldly life for 325 days, and then, like a Romanist, do penance for forty days, and this for a score of years in succession. Should the Angel of Death then appear, a day only before the next Lent, what the better would he be for his twenty previous Lents? Does fasting avail anything if our love of dissipation revives at Easter, and

yet are there not myriads who think that the old scores are wiped off and who open fresh ones at Easter, commencing too often with the display of new bonnets and the like, firmly believing the old proverb—

“At Easter let your clothes be new,
Or else be sure you will it rue.”

The Christian fast is not an artificial system of regulation of diet, nor at certain stated days and seasons, but the principle of fasting is *self-denial*, and that for the glory of God and the good of others. It is not to bow down his head like a bulrush and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him, but it is to keep his body in subjection, *at all times*, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens and to let the oppressed go free, to deal his bread to the hungry and to cover the naked. Such were the words of Isaiah, and they are binding still.

To conclude: There is a “Table of Feasts and Fasts” in the P.B., but there is not a single Stated Fast or Feast prescribed in the N.T., nor is there any exhortation to feasting or fasting made therein. Our Articles say, “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation.” Instead, then, of boasting of our Articles, why do we not follow them?

The interpolations herein referred to are Matt. xvii. 21, Mark ix. 29, Acts x. 30, and 1 Cor. vii. 5, and in these four places the word “fasting” is omitted in the Revised Version. The other fasts were either Jewish ones, as of Anna and the Pharisee, or involuntary ones, as those of Paul, who with his companions, in one case eat nothing for fourteen days,—that is to say nothing worth mentioning, as on account of the storm they had not had any regular meals. The only exceptions are

Acts xiii. 1 and xiv. 23, which either point out to a season of prayer, which was so earnest that it involved fasting as a consequence of it, or it was a relic of Judaism, but these two cases occurred about A.D. 45, and it is certain that Paul lived more than twenty years after, and in his fourteen epistles, all written after this date, he constantly and repeatedly urges prayer with thanksgiving, but never with fasting.

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